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## President Shelly Delivers State of the Navajo Nation Address

**Window Rock, AZ**—President Ben Shelly today delivered the State of the Navajo Nation Address to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council at the chambers on April 18, 2011.

The following text is from President Shelly's 2011 State of the Navajo Nation Address:

Speaker Johnny Naize, Chief Justice Herb Yazzie, Vice President Jim, fellow colleagues of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council, relatives and honored guests, *Ya'at'eeh*.

First and foremost, I want to honor the sacred duty of our warriors, our veterans, and acknowledge the sacrifice of mothers and fathers who watch them depart. We honor the memory of our Navajo Code Talkers who have passed this year, Marine Private First Class Johnny Alfred, Marine Corporal Joe Antonio Silversmith, and Marine Corporal Lloyd Oliver. They served our country with great distinction and with valor. Good thoughts and prayers continue to strengthen their loved ones.

We are working to do more for our veterans who have returned from the battlefield. In the next few weeks I will host a Veterans Summit to gather the ideas and concerns of our warriors, their spouses and our military families. This will be the first step for improving the veterans program and making their issues a priority of the people. Our Nation is proud of their service and we honor their memory today. The Navajo Code Talkers Museum and Veterans Center has my support. I ask the honorable representatives of the Navajo Nation Council to stand with me to complete this most worthy project. Wouldn't it be a great day for Mr. Chester Nez to witness the opening of this grand building, as he is the last Navajo Code Talker of the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers who developed the unbreakable code in Camp Pendleton?

Before I begin, allow me to introduce my wife of 46 years and our First Lady, Martha Shelly. I am grateful for her role in my life and the Nation stands alongside her as we honor National Child Abuse Prevention Month. She also continues to be an active volunteer, visiting elementary schools to promote early childhood reading and will soon join the *Let's Move Initiative* with United States First Lady, Michele Obama, to promote healthy eating and bring awareness to child obesity. Martha's main goal is to promote harmony in our families and to encourage positive reinforcement of our children who

need our love and support.

As a first people of this great land, we continue to find ourselves connected to Mother Earth and we always return home. We always return because this is where we are from, *Diné Bikyah*. Whether if we walk by foot, travel by road, or by spirit, we come back to Navajo knowing that we are all in this journey together. We have experienced great challenges and continue to restructure even today. It is times like these that test our resolve and our convictions to change our Nation. And despite disagreements or great debate, the Navajo Nation is still the leader in Indian Country because we chose to move forward as one people.

I am here to report that hope for the future is what our people speak of. Our people asked for positive change and new direction in leadership. They seek government decentralization in Window Rock and call for leaders who can come to their homes to hear their concerns. Vice President Jim and I answered their call and we are here to represent their voice. Our mothers want safer communities and schools that are accountable. Our fathers want more jobs and vocational training opportunities. Grandfathers want access to cleaner drinking water for their families and open boundaries to graze their livestock. Grandmothers ask for a return to the traditional way and for our young children to have every opportunity to succeed in the classroom. And our young people request for innovative ways for our Nation to invest into their future and the leadership skills that will assist them in completing college. Our community leaders want more local control and the rebuilding of our infrastructure. All across the Nation, there is hope.

We have been asked to rebuild and restructure a new Navajo government. To accomplish this great responsibility it will take all of us. This includes the direct involvement of the people. No other time in our history have they spoken so loud for accountability and transparency. So as we review the Title II amendments, we have to move forward and support the concept that the governing body of our Nation is the people. Vice President Jim and I have committed our support to carry out their request. It is our responsibility to change how we conduct business here in Window Rock. I know the Council has been working diligently in Title II work sessions to formulate sub-committees. I strongly encourage the Council to pass a committee structure that will allow the government to continue to provide services to our communities. It may need work, however, I am also committed to restructuring the Executive Branch and will work with you.

As I promised in my first address, I created the Executive Branch Reorganization Taskforce and the S.A.S. Executive Review Working Group to address cost containment and provide me with recommendations for creating a signature review process that is accountable. During my term, I envision a more customer friendly government, where our employees are empowered and where they go out of their way to help our grandmas, our grandpas, and our relatives. Our attitude will change and the government will be more cooperative. Since January, our administration is holding our tribal employees accountable as we generate effectiveness.

Last week, I sent a memo to executive branch employees directing a partial spending freeze and off-reservation travel restrictions. This is necessary and it is only the first step to prepare for larger budget cuts during these low economic times. This highlights my role as I continue to fight in Washington to protect funding for Indian Country. As you know, the federal government plans to cut \$4 trillion over 12

years, so it will be an uphill battle as more programs that serve Native Nations are targeted for cuts. We depend so much on federal funding but yet we use general funds to provide for our needs. I am taking steps for the Executive Branch to spend within our means and to merge programs and cut back on the duplication of services. Hard decisions will have to be made and it is not going to be easy. Greater financial responsibility is our priority. I encourage the Legislative and Judicial Branches to do the same.

As we speak of accountability, it is also my plan to utilize technology to streamline processes, create jobs, and support an administration that is transparent. We have the capability and talent to build a network that will thrust us into the technology age. The Navajo Nation received a \$32 million dollar grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act by the U.S. Department of Commerce Broadband Technology Opportunity Program. \$3.7 million dollars has been spent to date with 75% of the project to be completed by March 2012. We are overseeing the joint venture of NTUA & Commnet creating NTUA Wireless. Families will be connected to the World Wide Web. The Shelly-Jim Administration will continue to advance in utilizing technology to promote greater efficiency in our government.

We are moving forward with community development with the formation of the Navajo Nation comprehensive energy policy, which will be completed by the Summer Council Session. To ensure due diligence when observing potential energy endeavors, I have created the Energy Advisory Committee. On that note, we will receive \$7 million dollars in lease payments starting this summer, and \$65 million dollars annually in taxes as a result of my approving the APS lease extension for the Four Corners Power Plant. This decision has protected over 700 Navajo jobs and the livelihood of hundreds of families. Our energy portfolio will place emphasis on greener technologies like wind and solar initiatives as well.

Through our tenure as President and Vice President, our concentration will be the strengthening of the livelihood of our Navajo working class. This includes three focus areas: the development of our internal infrastructure, conception of a business friendly environment, and establishing global partnerships. We will continue to strive to build our nation's highways and roads and connect new waterlines, large water delivery systems, and utilities. In addition, Vice President Jim and I have reached out to the nations of Japan and China. There is potential there as the Asian countries build high-tech railways, airplanes, and have become the new economy of the world. The leaders of these countries are interested in the prospect of a Navajo Nation economic relationship. We have much to offer the global marketplace. Lets do business with them.

The communities of Upper Fruitland, New Mexico, and Leupp, Arizona, are excited to welcome the business opportunities the Northern Edge Navajo Casino and Twin Arrows Navajo Casino and Resort will provide to their local economies. Working together, we have created over 2,600 construction jobs, 1,200 permanent jobs, and will employ over 90% of our Navajo people to operate them.

Last month, Speaker Naize, a Navajo delegation and I traveled to New York City to present our Nation for a bond-rating grade assignment. Our economic potential is great and I am proud to report that the Navajo Nation received an "A grade-rating". This assessment will allow us to engage in bond financing opportunities; interest rates will go down, buildings can be constructed at a lower cost, and Navajo money will stretch further. This is the economic prosperity I continue to talk about.

Government cannot solve all our problems; it can only help create a better quality of life. Our role is to help create a more business friendly environment. It is not a Government's business to run businesses.

The Navajo Nation is about pioneering new ideas and with a strong and healthy people, surrounded by a rich and life-giving land, we will continue to thrust a great Nation into prosperous times. Hard decisions have to be made and our people seek confidence in their government. We will restore harmony and I cannot do this alone. *Shik' d shidin'*, as your President, I am asking you to help me lead our Nation. The Navajo spirit that has sustained us lives on in you, the people Speaker Johnny Naize, Chief Justice Herb Yazzie, Vice President Jim, fellow colleagues of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council, relatives and honored guests, *Ya'at'eeh*.

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Let us reclaim our role as the leader in innovative thinking and embrace the Navajo resolve. The prosperity of the Nation is what we see today.

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